

Washington State Patrol Media Release

Chief John R. Batiste



Captain Jeff DeVere
Government and Media Relations
(360) 753-5299 – office
(360) 753-5469 – fax
<http://www.wsp.wa.gov>

*****For Immediate Release*****

Date: April 2, 2008
Contact: Sergeant Freddy Williams
Phone: (360)-570-3108

New Law Makes False AMBER Alert a Felony

On March 20, 2008, Governor Christine Gregoire signed into law a bill making the filing of a false AMBER Alert a felony.

The AMBER Alert Program is a voluntary partnership between law-enforcement agencies, broadcasters, transportation agencies, and the wireless industry, to activate an urgent bulletin in the most serious child-abduction cases.

“AMBER Alerts have saved lives in the past, and we must protect their effectiveness for the future,” said Chief John R. Batiste of the Washington State Patrol. “Police officers, broadcasters and the general public must have confidence that AMBER Alerts are based on truthful reporting of an alleged abduction.”

The goal of an AMBER Alert is to instantly mobilize the entire community to assist in the search for and the safe recovery of an abducted, endangered child.

When an AMBER Alert is broadcast there are hundreds of eyes and ears and multiple broadcast companies and State and local agencies who dedicate important services into looking for the missing child. The expenditure of time and money for a false report is wasteful and compromises the effectiveness of the system.

“The local radio and television broadcasters of Washington thank the Legislature and Governor Gregoire for enacting SHB 2774. This is another step in the continuing effort to preserve the integrity of AMBER Alert, so that it remains an effective tool to recover abducted children safely and quickly.” stated Mark Allen, President and CEO of the Washington State Association of Broadcasters.

There have been no incidents in the State of Washington where a false Amber Alert has been broadcast but it has happened in other states.

In one state there have been four instances where adults have filed false missing children alerts. There were two separate instances in California where the reporting party indicated their car had been stolen and a child was in the car. In both of these instances there was no child in the car; the reporting party just wanted more people looking for their stolen car. There was one alert filed in Oregon by an estranged spouse who filed a false report indicating the father of the child had abducted the child in order to get the father arrested.

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From July 2004 through September 2007, there have been a total of 21 AMBER Alerts in Washington State. Two of those alerts were canceled when it was discovered the children were not missing, two were AMBER alerts from other states where the children were recovered in Washington.

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